

October 2004



MONTANA GEAR UP

GAINING EARLY AWARENESS & READINESS FOR
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education / Montana University System

GEAR UP



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Director's Message: by Sandy Merdinger

It was great to see so many of you at the fall conference! From what I heard, Dr. Winston Johnson was a highlight of the conference and several of you would like to bring him back to visit your schools. If you do, please let us know. Maybe some schools could get together to share the travel expenses. Thanks to all of you who presented at the conference. We appreciate you sharing your knowledge and best practices with your colleagues!

With the fall conference behind us, we are moving our focus to the ongoing work of the year and writing the new grant. Don't be surprised to hear from us asking us for information as we proceed in writing the grant! We are also busy getting implementation plans approved, arranging for the PTC Pro/DESKTOP software training, preparing campus visit reference materials, arranging school visits and the list goes on!

You will be receiving Achievement Grant information in the mail soon. Encourage your students who qualify to apply. Remember that the only eligible applicants for the GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship are seniors who receive the Achievement Grant in their junior year.

Welcome Andrea Rankin & Annette Walstad:

GEAR UP welcomes two new staff members, Andrea Rankin and Annette Walstad, who joined the office in September. Andrea and Annette will both work half-time as program managers with the state GEAR UP office.

Andrea will be working on pulling together information for the new federal grant as well as working on the Commissioner's Shared Leadership for a Stronger Montana Economy initiative. Originally from Washington, DC, Andrea worked there as a policy analyst for the Immigration and Naturalization Service for four and a half years. Before that, she received her Master of Public Administration and Master of Social Work from Columbia University and Bachelor degree in English from Oberlin College in Ohio. Andrea and her family left Washington, DC for Helena, in April 2002 and have never looked back!

Annette will focus on the college visit program, assisting with the new grant, and coordinating professional development opportunities. She will also work with GEAR UP schools in eastern Montana until a replacement at OPI is selected for Everall Fox. Annette has 15 years of experience in higher education, most recently serving as Director of Admissions at the UM-Helena College of Technology for eight years. For the past two and a half years, she has provided communication and human resources consulting for Communication and Management Services (CMS) in Helena. Through CMS, she conducted the college visit focus groups with liaisons, counselors, and admissions staff.

Annette grew up on a farm in beautiful northeastern Montana and graduated from Opheim High School. A first-generation college student, Annette completed her Bachelor degree at Carroll College and Master of Education degree at Montana State University-Bozeman. Annette lives in Helena with her husband and three girls ages 9, 4, and 18 months.

The GEAR UP Spotlight: Kila

Nadine Ordway, GEAR UP Liaison in Kila, is a brave soul. Every year she coordinates and chaperones a trip to Seattle with the Kila 8th grade graduates to visit the Seattle Art Institute and the University of Washington. Throughout the school year 8th graders earn all of the money needed to participate on this special college visit. The annual trip culminates a year of prep work for the students to help in their transition to high school.



On September 28, 2004, this year's 8th grade class began their transition work by experiencing the SOAR Challenge Course at Whitefish High School. This challenge course teaches life skills such as team work, respect for themselves and each other, leadership, goal setting skills, and how to continually challenge themselves through high school and beyond. Nadine said all of the students agreed that it was a great experience that helped them build confidence and was fun.

Nadine said it was such a good experience that she "would recommend that any one that works with a group of people or any individual for that matter try to find a ropes course like this and give it a try."



Staff Accolades:

Congratulations are in order for Tina Wagner, our favorite outreach coordinator at MGSIP and Kelly Hert our favorite federal accountant.

After hearing Tina present at the National Conference in D.C. this last July, members of the West Virginia GEAR UP program were so impressed that they invited her to present at their state GEAR UP conference in October. Way to Go Tina!!

Kelly Hert, our fiscal manager has been awarded the Governor's Award for Excellence. According to a recent press release, the awards program is a chance to publicly recognize outstanding state employees for the vital services they provide to all Montanans. Kelly and other award recipients were honored at a ceremony in Helena on September 22, 2004 where Governor Martz presented the awards. "Recognition is a powerful tool and it is an honor for me to personally present these awards to each of these individuals," said Governor Judy Martz. Congratulations, Kelly!

Fall Conference Report:

According to verbal feedback and the written evaluations, this year's conference was a big success. To the number, everyone agreed that our keynote address delivered by Dr. Winston Johnson was fantastic. Attendees heard from Dr. Johnson things that educators, parents and students can do to ensure that no child will be left behind. A lot of the content from Dr. Johnson's message we have heard before but his powerful delivery is what drove it home. Thanks to this dynamic kickoff, the positive energy and enthusiasm carried through the rest of the conference.

Other plenary sessions included messages from Dr. Wayne Trotter, the superintendent from Plummer, ID; Dr. Jenny Severson from Quantum Learning gave educators some hands on tools for the classroom; Derrick Starlight entertained the crowd with his cultural awareness message; and a panel of college students from GEAR UP schools shared information on what they wish they would have known prior to starting college.

We were also fortunate to hear best practices and strategies that are currently being used in our schools around Montana.

The evaluations have been compiled and tallied and overwhelmingly participants concur that this was our best conference yet!



Conference attendees showing their moves during Derrick Starlight's cultural awareness session from left: Dr. Clay Dunlap, Garth Ferro, Jim Mephram and Mathew Johnson.

“Fall Kickoff” poster contest:

The first-ever Montana GEAR UP poster contest garnered 36 middle school and 33 high school participants. Most of the posters submitted incorporated the poster theme “GEAR UP – Achieving Success”. Attendees at the Fall Conference cast their votes for 1st and 2nd places but because there were so many wonderful posters, the GEAR UP staff selected two ‘honorable mention’ winners in each category. Poster contest winners will receive gift certificates to Amazon.com in the amount of \$25.00 for first place and \$15.00 for second place. Thank you to all of the 69 students who shared their artistic talents...and thank you to the liaisons, counselors, and teachers who encouraged participation in this event.

Middle School Poster Winners – 36 entries

1st – Cara Small, Rocky Boy Jr. High – 8th grade

2nd – Lindsay Russell, Lincoln Jr. High – 7th grade

Honorable Mention – Daniel Nault, Rocky Boy’s Jr. High – 8th grade

Honorable Mention – Cecilia Gardipee, Rocky Boy’s Jr. High – 8th grade

High School Poster Winners – 33 entries

1st – Dameon Youngquist, Lincoln High School – 10th grade

2nd – Tricia Tothill, Brady High School – 12th grade

Honorable Mention – Patricia Huntley, Box Elder High School – 12th grade

Honorable Mention – Aldeau Paige, Rocky Boy’s High School – 12th grade

Coming this fall - Life 101:

As part of their continuing effort to increase student attendance and success in postsecondary education, the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program has purchased a copy of the newspaper *Life 101* for **every** high school student in the state. This publication comes in two formats: one designed for freshman and sophomore students, and one for junior and senior students. Included inside each issue of *Life 101* are informative articles designed to assist high school students in making the transition to college and the adult world. In addition to compelling leadership profiles, *Life 101* features articles on careers, financial aid, life skills, and financial literacy. Distribution is set for late October or early November.

- The PTC Pro/DESKTOP software training is set for October 21-22 in Great Falls. A memo was sent to schools with more information. **October Reminders:**
- Return the registration form immediately as slots will be filled on a first come first served basis.
- Achievement Grant information is being distributed to schools by MGSLP on October 1. The deadline to turn in applications is November 5. Remember, only recipients of the Achievement Grant are eligible to apply for the Montana GEAR UP Pathways scholarship.
- Be sure to contact MGSLP soon to schedule financial aid presentations in your schools.
- Kelly Hert, the Federal Programs accountant, will be conducting three training sessions for school clerks on November 15, 16, 17 in Billings, Great Falls and St. Ignatius respectively. Once specific times are set, further information will be provided.
- Final fiscal reports from the 2003-2004 school year were due September 30, 2004. Funds for 2004-2005 will not be released until reports are received and approved.
- Implementation Plans and Budget Narratives for 2004-2005 were due September 30th. Funding is not available until these have been received and approved.
- The next Liaison meeting is scheduled for January 31-February 1, 2005 at Chico Hot Springs.
- The external surveys were distributed at the fall conference and are to be returned to the Montana Small Schools Alliance by November 5.
- Please submit your GEAR UP Spotlight articles by the 20th of the month to be included in following newsletters to Peter Butler at pbutler@ocche.montana.edu.
- This newsletter is also available online by visiting <http://gearup.montana.edu/>
- Please let us know if someone would like to be added to the newsletter distribution list.

Student Corner: "Mapping your Future" live chat

Finding the school of your dreams and gaining admission - Mapping Your Future chat to answer questions about college admissions and financial aid planning

For those students thinking about college next semester or next fall, it's not too early to begin preparing admission applications and planning for financial aid.

Mapping Your Future (mapping-your-future.org), a public-service web site providing college, career, financial aid, and financial literacy information and services, will offer a "Finding the school of your dreams and gaining admission" chat event on October 12, 2004 to help those students and their families.

This live event, scheduled for 5 p.m. mountain time, provides a unique opportunity to receive advice on the college admissions and financial aid processes. The interactive event is designed to help students navigate through what some consider a maze of career, college, and financial aid information. The second of a series of chat night events to be offered by Mapping Your Future this school year, the chat event will provide experts in college admissions and financial aid from all over the country.

During this chat event, students and their families will learn more about:

- selecting a school
- paying for school
- preparing academically for college
- applying to school
- considering different types of schools
- determining eligibility for federal student aid
- completing the FAFSA application
- figuring financial need and expected family contribution
- considering the various options for paying for school

Anyone with internet access can join in the chat event at mapping-your-future.org on the evening of the chat and following the link to the chat at top of the page. Simple instructions will guide you on how to join the event.

Mapping Your Future is a national collaborative, public-service project of the financial aid industry. It brings together the expertise of the industry to provide free college, career, financial aid, and financial literacy services for schools, students, and families.

Do you know someone who would like to be added to the newsletter distribution list? Please let us know!

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National GEAR UP website:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/index.html>